

# The Boy in the Boat

"It's a great art, is rowing. It's the finest art there is. It's a symphony of motion. And when you're rowing well, why it's nearing perfection. And when you near perfection, you're touching the Divine. It touches the you of yours. Which is your soul."

— Daniel James Brown,

*from* **The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics**

Only one of us rowed crew. Only one of us performed athletically in college on a national stage. It was a big deal to my brother Pete and a big deal to our father. I recall Pete wanted Helen and I to change the date of our wedding so he could both attend and row in the regional. Dad attended both. Pete rowed in the regional.

*Pete recalls the encouragement he received from our father:* When I was later appointed to the Naval Academy, Dad suggested that I would be a perfect fit for rowing crew. I knew nothing about crew, had never even seen a racing shell, and was concerned that I could not compete on a collegiate level – particularly at a top rowing college like the Naval Academy, which the year before I was to start there had won every event at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships – but I was determined to go hard for it. So I tried out for the crew team at USNA, and was pleasantly surprised when I made First Boat on the Freshman Heavyweight Crew team and then again made First Boat on the Varsity Heavyweight Crew team.

Dad was so happy and excited at my success, and became my biggest fan – even sending me encouraging telegrams before my races. When he learned that I had won a spot to race in the IRA National Championships, he (at age 71) actually flew from Houston to Syracuse, New York to sit outside (in a driving rain storm) in the stands at Lake Onondaga to watch me race. And when my boat decisively won our race, and I and my racing boat teammates had our picture taken by Sports Illustrated, he tracked down that Sports Illustrated photographer, obtained a copy of that picture, framed it, and proudly put it on his wall. Most important to me, he was there at the end of my victorious race to embrace me while I was experiencing the most extraordinary, euphoric high of my life.

When Dad passed away in 1982, and we buried him with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery, it was very hard for me. He had been my rock. So I wanted to somehow create a special memorial for him. I knew that when a crew racing shell is taken out of its rack to practice or race, the oarsmen call out the name of that shell as they lift it onto their shoulders

to carry it to the water. What better memorial than to have Dad's name called out each day, at his beloved Naval Academy, in the sport which he had encouraged his youngest child to pursue, as oarsmen lift his named racing shell onto their shoulders just as he had once lifted me onto his shoulders? So I asked my four wonderful siblings to join me in donating a racing shell to the Naval Academy in Dad's name, and all four graciously joined me in that donation.

The Naval Academy held a special dedication & christening ceremony for the "CAPT ALLAN BLACKLEDGE" racing shell, complete with Naval Academy officials & photographers, in which all five of us Blackledge siblings participated (see pic). The USNA Varsity Heavyweight Crew subsequently rowed that shell to a decisive victory in the IRA National Championships. And at the end of its long, illustrious racing career, the CAPT ALLAN BLACKLEDGE racing shell was permanently mounted to the ceiling of the USNA Varsity Crew banquet hall, where it continues to be honored.

Pete wishes to continue that proud Navy tradition, well into the future. Here is what he is making happen at the 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion of his US Naval Academy Class of 1969.